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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000609

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: KOZULIN'S PARTY SPLINTERING ONE YEAR AFTER  
IMPRISONMENT

REF: A. 06 MINSK 731

[1](#)B. MINSK 209

[1](#)C. 06 MINSK 1222

[1](#)D. 05 MINSK 481

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

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[1](#)1. (C) One year after the politically motivated imprisonment of former opposition presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin, Kozulin's party appears to be splintering over rivalries among his party's deputies and disagreements regarding Belarusian relations with Russia and the West. These differences could adversely affect the democratic coalition's overall unity in the run up to 2008 parliamentary elections. End Summary.

BSDP Cracks Form After Kozulin's Imprisonment

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[1](#)2. (C) On the anniversary of the GOB's 2006 political-motivated trial of imprisoned opposition Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Gramada" (BSDP) Chair and presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin (ref A), BSDP members are deeply divided over issues of leadership, finance, and geo-political orientation. Fissures within BSDP appeared within a month after Kozulin's conviction with the election of Anatoliy Levkovich as Acting BSDP Chair in August [1](#)2006. Soon thereafter, former BSDP Deputy Chair Vladimir Nistyuk told us that he would form a faction within BSDP as a counterweight to Levkovich, whose commitment to campaigning for Kozulin's freedom Nistyuk questioned. (Note: In February 2007, Nistyuk attributed his eventual resignation as Deputy Chair to his uneasiness with Levkovich's close association with opposition Belarusian Party of Communists Chair Sergey Kalyakin, from whom Levkovich has reportedly received significant financial support (ref B). End Note.)

Levkovich's Power Increases, Loyalty to Kozulin in Doubt

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[1](#)3. (C) On July 16, senior BSDP member and close Kozulin confidant Oleg Volchek echoed Nistyuk's suspicions about Levkovich's loyalty to Kozulin. Volchek told us that the divisions within BSDP deepened significantly after a March 4, 2007 BSDP Congress narrowly voted out Levkovich's "pro-Kozulin" rival, Aleksey Korol, as BSDP Deputy Chair and replaced Korol and Nistyuk with Levkovich loyalists Anatoliy Sidorevich and Ivan Antashkevich. Noting that the BSDP Minsk Regional Head recently called for removal of Levkovich and his deputies, Volchek described the election of Sidorevich

and Antashkevich as part of Levkovich's broader efforts to replace Kozulin-appointed, working-level BSDP leaders with Levkovich supporters. Volchek added that he suspects that the BKGB may be actively encouraging these machinations as part of its efforts to weaken Belarus' pro-democratic opposition.

¶4. (C) On July 12, Deputy Chair and former Kozulin attorney Igor Rynkevich also told Acting Pol/Econ Chief about Levkovich's efforts to minimize the influence of "pro-Kozulin" BSDP members and complained that the March 4 BSDP election results were skewed in favor of Levkovich's "less pro-Kozulin" camp because only members of BSDP chapters officially registered by the GOB, about 40 to 45 percent of all 1,600 BSDP members, were allowed to vote. Echoing what Korol told us on July 4, Rynkevich insisted that the "true majority" of BSDP members would have re-elected Korol, whom Kozulin had endorsed. When asked why Kozulin had not openly opposed Levkovich's re-election, Rynkevich answered, "Because even Kozulin recognizes that Levkovich saved the party - for now."

Westernizers vs. Russophiles?  
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¶5. (C) Ultimately, Rynkevich expressed stronger concern that another divide within BSDP between pro-Russian and pro-Western factions was growing. Identifying himself as "generally pro-Western but not anti-Russian," Rynkevich said that the pro-Russian BSDP elements tended to back Levkovich because of his close ties to Kalyakin, whom BSDP "Westernizers" oppose because of Kalyakin's alleged support from Russian sources. Rynkevich described himself as a "mediator" in the conflict and expressed hope that a new BSDP faction led by former political prisoner and Kozulin

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confident Sergey Skrebets (ref C), who was elected Head of BSDP's Minsk City Chapter on July 11, would help mend fences within his party for the good of Belarus' broader democratic opposition. For his part, on July 4 Skrebets told us that he supports close relations with Russia but will use his position "to unite all of Belarus' social democrats against the Lukashenko regime."

Comment  
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¶6. (C) Acrimonious and incessant factionalism has long been a feature of Belarus' social democratic politics (ref D). However, another BSDP schism could undercut efforts to unify the democratic coalition writ large in the run up to Belarus' 2008 parliamentary elections. Thus, we would welcome efforts by senior BSDP leaders to reconcile their differences and continue working for Kozulin's release.  
Stewart